

## Against the Grain

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Volume 29 | Issue 5

Article 24

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November 2017

# Notes From Mosier- Thoughts on the Past, the Present and the Future

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### Recommended Citation

Smith, Scott Alan (2017) "Notes From Mosier- Thoughts on the Past, the Present and the Future," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 29: Iss. 5, Article 24.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7852>

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## Book Reviews from page 60

share the costs of a digital library program over many institutions, or for the reader's own library simply to prioritize ongoing support for digital collections, both of which would be great solutions if only the reader could implement them simply by snapping her fingers.

**Dority, G. Kim.** *Rethinking Information Work: A Career Guide for Librarians and Other Information Professionals.* 2nd ed. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2016. 9781591581802. 236 pages. \$55

Reviewed by **Steve Sowards** (Associate Director for Collections, Michigan State University Libraries) <sowards@msu.edu>

At least 20 books on job-seeking and career-management for librarians have been published since the Great Recession. Those works cover:

- Advice for new or prospective professionals, in *What They Don't Teach You in Library School* by **Elisabeth Doucett** (ALA, 2010).
- The application and hiring process, in *A Librarian's Guide to an Uncertain Job Market* by **Jeannette Woodward** (ALA, 2011); *How to Stay Afloat in the Academic Library Job Pool* by **Teresa Y. Neely** (ALA, 2011); and *What Do Employers Want? A Guide for Library Science Students* by **Priscilla K. Shontz** and **Richard A. Murray** (Libraries Unlimited, 2012).
- Summaries of traditional and less traditional paths, in *Career Opportunities in Library and Information Science* by **Allan Taylor** and **James Robert Parish** (Infobase, 2009); and *Information Services Today: An Introduction* by **Sandra Hirsh** (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).
- Career reflections by established librarians, in *Working in the Virtual Stacks: The New Library & Information Science* by **Laura Townsend Kane** (ALA, 2011); and *Making the Most of Your Library Career* by **Lois Stickell** and **Bridgette Sanders** (ALA, 2014).
- Reflections on change and opportunities in the field, in *The Agile Librarian's Guide to Thriving in Any Institution* by **Michelynn McKnight** (Libraries Unlimited, 2010); and *Libraries in the Information Age: An Introduction and Career Exploration* by **Denise K. Fourie** and **David R. Dowell** (Libraries Unlimited, 2009).

**Dority**, a long-time instructor for the **University of Denver** MLIS program, touches on all these issues. The book is based on her class about careers. This updated edition, available in print or as an eBook, takes into account recent trends and issues. **Dority** speaks to prospective and current MLIS students, recent graduates of MLIS programs, mid-career professionals planning their next step, free-lancers and others attracted to non-traditional careers, and late-career librarians thinking about "encore" careers before and during retirement.

**Dority** surveys the landscape of information industry employment — with an emphasis on work in libraries, rather than corporate or publishing settings — and today's array of diverse career paths. Readers can tap exercises in self-awareness; action plans and worksheets; tips for being marketable; and comments about "resilient" careers that are immune to radical change.

An important feature is **Dority's** selection of resources at the end of each chapter and in three appendices. Amounting to 100 pages, these resource lists make up more than a third of the book, and identify relevant and practical websites, blog posts, books, articles, periodicals, and databases such as job sharing sites. This is an attractive book for browsing: thanks to the layout, the index and the detailed table of contents, readers can quickly find content that matches their current interests. Specific chapters deal with:

- personal competencies to achieve ongoing career success;
- awareness of personal preferences, strengths and aptitudes;
- "traditional" careers in public, school, or academic libraries, and in public services, technical services, administrative, or data management roles;
- characteristics of "non-traditional" jobs, including comments about start-ups;
- techniques to build "independent" careers in research or consulting;
- best practices for social media, resumes, portfolios, job histories, and interview skills;
- lifelong learning as a response to change in the workplace;
- ongoing professional career assets such as networking, reputation and branding;
- career maps, goal-setting, and strategic thinking as tools; and
- sources of resilience in careers, including self-advocacy and confidence-building.

Whether deciding upon a new library career, managing applicant pools in a search process, contemplating a jump to new responsibilities, or planning ahead for decisions prior to retirement, librarians are likely to find useful concepts, tips and resources in **Dority's** book. 🐾

## Notes from Mosier — Thoughts on the Past, the Present, and the Future...

Column Editor: **Scott Alan Smith** (Librarian at Large, Mosier, Oregon) <scott.alan.smith@comcast.net>

**P**ublishing, bookselling, and librarianship are related fields and professions that have all undergone fundamental changes over the years. During the latter half of the twentieth century, significant growth of federal support of higher education, the advent and ongoing evolution of library automation, and, moving into more current years, the revolutionary emergence of Internet/Web based resources have re-shaped and re-defined much of the core of the library world. The needs and demands of this world have changed in many ways, and the range and nature of job opportunities reflect corresponding and dramatic change.

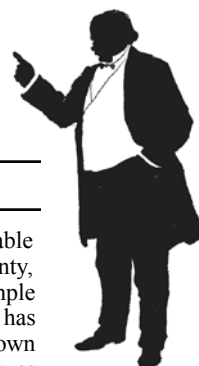
My career during this recent history has been somewhat unusual — I started as a bookseller, and worked for nearly thirty years in an academic library market that has undergone enormous change in the last several years. For many of the (then) traditional library vendors this has meant extinction. I saw this change coming, and responded by going back and earning my MLIS, and then, after years of dealing with large academic institutions, serving as director of a small public library.

Change continues, as always, and represents both the advent of new products and services, and the erosion and at times com-

plete loss of basic, valuable resources. Douglas County, Oregon is but one example of a library system that has been completely closed down due to today's budget issues — and the perception (valid or not) that alternative, less expensive options satisfy needs to community satisfaction.

I have been thinking about this quite a bit lately, fueled in part by ongoing change and in part by musings over the passing of an ever-growing number of former colleagues and

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friends. Memories have sparked my thoughts on where we've been, where we are, and where we seem to be going — and bring me to reflect on these people again.

Arguably one of the most fundamental shifts in this world has been automation — both in the evolution of integrated library systems and the Web. A corresponding transition from primarily print-based library collections and educational programs to a far more diverse range of print and online resources is reflected by massive changes in libraries and the businesses serving their requirements.

So, first a few musings over the recent past. When I joined **Blackwell North America**, large academic libraries were primarily print-based, and approval plans were the foremost mechanism used to select and acquire appropriate books. **Blackwell North America** was created in 1975 to re-create the elaborate, sophisticated acquisitions process developed in the late 1950s and 1960s by the Portland, Oregon-based **Richard Abel Company**.

**Dick Abel** was a **Reed College** alumnus who began selling to regional college and university libraries from the **Reed College** bookstore in the 1950s — his early customers included the **University of Oregon**, the **University of Washington**, the **University of British Columbia**, as well as the (then) **Portland State College**. **Dick** hired a number of people who crafted the development of what became industry standard for approval programs, as well as other early vendor technical services — i.e., MARC records supplied with books, with authority control and related options. **Don Stave** was one of many librarians hired by the **Abel Company**, and **Don** was the principal creator of the **Abel** approval product family. **Abel's** staff also developed a complete package for opening day collections.

One of **Dick's** early partners was a Portland bookstore pioneer, **James Quick**. **Jim** was a key partner in retail bookselling in Portland long before **Powell's**, and went on to become one of **Dick's** principal executives. **Jim** was one of several **Abel** staff who was kept on when the company failed in 1974; he stayed with **Blackwell's** through the 1980s.

The 1960s saw an enormous growth in the academic community in the United States, and in response many book vendors were established to serve this market, including **Academic Book Center**, **Ballen Book House**, **Coutts Scholarly Book Center**, and **Taylor & Francis**. Other already established vendors whose primary customer base was elsewhere also joined the club — **Baker & Taylor**, for one, dating to the early nineteenth century in the U.S., established an approval plan for the academic sector based on the **Abel** model and expanded beyond their (primarily) public library client base during this period.

**Blackwell's** began as a single, Oxford-based academic bookstore in 1879. By the 1960s the company had grown into three divisions: retail (UK only), publishing, and

library supply. In the 1960s there were two **Blackwell** employees in North America: **Jamie Galbraith** (from the Isle of Barra in the Outer Hebrides) and **Jack Walsdorf** (from Wisconsin). With the creation of **Blackwell North America**, **Jamie** and **Jack** became part of what would become the largest academic library book vendor — including the aforementioned **Don Stave** and **Jim Quick**, as well as **Donald Benjamin Satsky** (initially a sales rep on the east coast, and eventually international sales manager), **Ted Franz** (**Ted** did much to create what became widely accepted in the serials industry as “standing orders”), and many others. **Blackwell's** was a family owned company in those days, and the library supply division was primarily under the guidance of **Miles Blackwell**.

This brings us up (at least a bit closer) to the present. Alas, all of the aforementioned people have passed away. The publishing division of **Blackwell's** was sold off to **Wiley** earlier this century; what remains of the library supply division has been spun off to other vendors; and retail (now employee owned) remains as a mere shadow of its heyday. Many of the other aforementioned vendors are out of business; of those that remain the actual delivery of print products has been in many instances overtaken by access to and delivery of online products and resources.

There are still a number of alumni with us: I should mention **Becky** and **Julie Babcock**, **Sieglinde Berlage**, **Bob Carlin**, **Cindy Christman**, **Phil Fecteau**, **Tina Feick**, **Eileen Heaslip**, **Bob Langhorst**, **Mike Markwith**, **Peter May**, **Ruth Rich**, and **Sue Trevethan**.

After my first career I shifted gears into librarianship, in a small public library on the southwest Oregon coast. Curry County is among the poorest counties in the state — the two industries, fishing and timber, had largely disappeared by the time I moved there. Public libraries in Oregon depend primarily on property taxes; my district's rate was actually pretty decent — there just weren't enough properties there to provide truly adequate support.

Many of the administrative tasks of the job were exactly that: administrative — work that did not directly address librarianship. Indeed, the more traditional reference, circulation, and patron interaction aspects of the job were among my favorite duties. The **State Library** in Oregon provides a wide range of services and support for public libraries, and their staff was a great help to me in addressing many issues. Dealing with operational concerns demanded a great deal of time and effort — the building had no security or fire systems, the ILS used by all but one of the county's public libraries was among the oldest and weakest (the county has since consolidated with neighboring Coos County in a much better system), and the ongoing need to solicit grants and gifts required constant attention. We were the only public facility in town; we provided ongoing meeting space, movie nights, lectures, music, and other cultural activities. We had a small but dedicated friends group, who did their best to support ongoing book sales, raffles, and other events.

Nonetheless, the challenges remained daunting. Given a very limited budget, acquisitions was an ongoing struggle. One of my loyal patrons was fond of a popular author (author and publisher to remain anonymous out of sheer annoyance); at one point she requested a new title, which upon searching I discovered was (a) only available as an eBook and (b) not sold to libraries.

Given the county's economy, my patron base was predominantly retired people or young students — demand for electronic resources was atypically low. Although it was a constant struggle to meet patron demand, given our limited budget, we managed to do reasonably well.

After accomplishing most of what I sought to do there, I came back to the Columbia River Gorge — Mosier is a small town between Hood River and The Dalles, about an hour and a half east of Portland. (At present the Gorge is suffering from the worst wildfires in recent history, and the libraries are doing their best to serve struggling communities.) Hood River has become a popular tourist town, promoting world-class wind surfing, skiing, and other outdoor activities. The Dalles remains a more old-fashioned place, with a more middle and lower class economy and patron base.

The local public libraries reflect this, and help inform at least some views regarding the world ahead. Hood River County failed to pass their budget in 2010, and the system closed, but was re-instated a couple of years later. The current system is more focused on electronic resources (although I am impressed with what they do purchase in print); their current patrons are closely tied to where things are going. The Dalles serves a larger percentage of patrons who can't afford or make use of e-resources, and so still reflects an older model of libraries. Their ability to satisfy their community's needs will be increasingly challenged as time moves forward.

Libraries still need staff familiar with and capable of managing print resources, but now also require support for an ever-growing range of non-print tools. The vendors who support access and navigation (but not necessarily ownership) of this universe are also undergoing fundamental and substantial organizational and staff change.

One apt illustration of this is the program of a library conference I've been involved with since its inception: the **Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge** (which grew out of the **Feather River Institute**). Compare the program topics from the early 1990s to today, and you'll see dramatic shifts in topics (and the focus of the presenters). Most of the people involved with the founding of this conference have retired — e.g., **Richard Brumley**, of **Cal Poly San Luis Obispo** and later **Oregon State University**, and **Tom Leonhardt**, a veteran of many signature institutions; finally **St. Edward's University of Austin, Texas** — and I will likely join them ere long. Were I to guess what the topics will be in future, it would be just that — a guess. 🌲